

## **Program Helps Seniors Walk Again**

### ***Issue***

Public health nurse Beulah Hand began to notice a disturbing trend while working at the Bamberg Council on Aging Senior Center. Many of the 70 to 80 seniors served daily were unable to walk without the assistance of a cane or walker. "I remember Mrs. Manigault entered the room slowly pushing her walker toward me while asking, 'can you help me walk again?'" recalled Beulah.

Arthritis is the leading cause of disability among U.S. adults, limiting everyday activities for more than 7 million Americans and costing more than \$51 billion for medical care annually. South Carolina has the ninth highest prevalence rate of arthritis in the nation. In Bamberg County approximately 12 percent of the population are seniors, and many of them suffer from arthritis and other conditions that limit their joint mobility.

### ***Intervention***

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control in Bamberg County is working with community partners to stop the crippling effects of arthritis. Without Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant funding, this project would not have been possible. Approximately \$2,500 to \$3,000 was used to support community-based education for seniors. For the past 12 months Beulah and eight other trainers have worked with eight senior groups in Bamberg County to improve members' health using the Arthritis Self-Help Course (ASHC) and People with Arthritis Can Exercise (PACE) programs. Beulah and her colleagues focused on the importance of physical activity and how it can improve flexibility and the overall health of seniors suffering from arthritis. During the eight-week session, participants also learned the importance of healthy eating to reduce weight. Everyone received materials and a book to encourage them to teach others in their households.

To carry out the intervention, the involved parties:

- Recruited two churches to host the programs and also set regular session dates at the local senior center so the program would reach seniors with limited transportation options;
- Distributed flyers throughout the community to notify potential participants;
- Ran ads and articles in the local newspaper; and
- Certified other trainers in PACE after Beulah's initial intervention so the program would continue.

### ***Impact***

As a result of the arthritis classes the senior center director said "over one-third of the participants (previously) using walkers no longer need assistance, saving them approximately \$110.00 per person." This also reduced doctor visits by half for participants completing the program. Other results include:

- 85 seniors participated in the PACE program and 82 participated in the ASHC program.
- Eight trainers are currently teaching PACE program in Bamberg County.
- Orangeburg County is currently replicating this program in partnership with The Regional Medical Center, and the first training is scheduled for January 2006 with eight people currently committed to attend.

The seniors of Bamberg are excited about their ability to move without pain and their new eating habits to support health. Because of this intervention, participants not only learned about proper exercises to improve flexibility but they also can now prepare simple healthy meals. "Eight weeks later, I will never forget a smiling Mrs. Manigault walking into the final class without a walker!" Beulah said.

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